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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 000069

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E.O. 12958: DECLASSIFY ON 01/17/2017

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SUBJECT: UAE AVOIDS USING AIR ROUTES OVER DISPUTED UAE-IRANIAN
TERRORITY

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON FOR REASONS 1.4 (b&d).

11. (C) Summary. In an apparent reaction to disagreements between the UAE and Iran regarding jurisdiction over air routes passing near the disputed island of Abu Musa, the UAEG has reportedly ceased using a major air corridor over the Gulf. The change adds pressure to an already congested air corridor which requires flights from Dubai and Sharjah to take off from and approach via a generally north-westerly direction. Although, UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nayhan (AbZ) told Ambassador that he understood the problem had been resolved on January 10, as far as the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) is aware, the dispute remains un-resolved. According to GCAA Deputy General Director Ahmed Al Hadabi, the UAE is not using the disputed air corridor "because the UAE has issues with Iran." End summary.

12. (C) General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) officials previously told the Defense Attache Office (DAO) that the UAE had stopped using the "P-574" air corridor for "safety of flight" reasons, rejecting Iran's assertion of sovereignty over the route. Rather than engage in cumbersome and unpredictable coordination with Iran, the UAE chose to focus on alternative routing and requested that U.S. Air Force assets using UAE airspace re-route where possible to alleviate pressure on the now over-crowded north-westerly routing. DAO is looking at shifting more flights overland to avoid the congested area. (Note. The "P-574" air corridor over the disputed territory of Abu Musa is a primary corridor for flights to Eastern Europe. Now those flights are being sent on a flight corridor used generally for travel to Western Europe, essentially adding traffic to an already busy path. End note.)

13. (C) On January 10, UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan (AbZ) told Ambassador the situation had been resolved (and also noted that it had not/not been raised during his January 9 visit to Tehran). However, on January 11 and 17, Econoff spoke to Deputy Director General of the UAE Civil Aviation Authority, Ahmed al Hadabi, who said the UAE and Iran have had an agreement allowing the UAE to freely use the "P-574" air corridor for approximately ten years. However, last month Iran suddenly made an additional demand that the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority must contact the Iranian Aviation Authority to get permission for flights to use the air corridor, which violates the terms of the prior agreement. As such, the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority stopped using the air corridor. Al Hadabi said the UAEG has submitted the dispute to the International Civil Aviation Organization for mediation.

14. (C) Comment: The Abu Musa/Greater and Lesser Tunbs islands dispute is a long-standing and mildly acrimonious facet of a complex bilateral relationship between the UAE and Iran, yet has rarely presented practical inconvenience for the UAE. The UAE desire to avoid sharing coordination of a key air route with Iran is indicative of common frustrations in the relationship, with the UAE simply taking the less confrontational way out of a neighborly flap over air space. It is too early to tell how or if the problem has been fully resolved. End comment.

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